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ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors related to five antecedents of library anxiety among college students: (1) barriers with staff (the perception that librarians and other library staff are intimidating and unapproachable; (2) affective barriers (feelings of inadequacy about using the library); (3) comfort with the library (how safe, welcoming, and non-threatening students perceive the library to be); (4) knowledge of the library (how familiar with the library students feel they are); and (5) mechanical barriers (feelings which emerge as a result of reliance on mechanical library equipment). Students from two universities (n=522) were administered the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) and the Demographic Information Form (DIF). The LAS, a 43-item 5-point Likert-format instrument, assessed levels of library anxiety based on the five antecedents. The DIF recorded relevant demographic information, including gender, age, native language, year of study, academic achievement, course load, number of credit hours, number of library instruction courses taken, computer experience, study habits, employment status, distance between home and the library, frequency of library visits, and reasons for visiting the library. Data were analyzed to determine the relationship between the antecedents of library anxiety and selected variables. Based on the findings, recommendations specific to each antecedent were developed. (Contains 10 references.) (MES)

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Factors Associated with Library Anxiety

Virtually all college students are required to use the library extensively in order to succeed academically. Unfortunately, many students are unprepared (Mech & Brooks, 1995) and, thus, are extremely apprehensive when doing so (Egan, 1992). This uneasiness experienced by students has been defined by Mellon (1986) as library anxiety, an uncomfortable feeling or emotional disposition, experienced in a library setting, which has cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral ramifications. Specifically, library-anxious students experience more interfering responses during various stages of the information search process (Kuhlthau, 1991), and, as such, tend to focus less of their energy and attention on the task itself, thus impeding their learning process (Mech & Brooks, 1995; Mellon, 1988).

Students with high levels of library anxiety often exhibit many symptoms. For example, in attempting to find books or periodicals, a library-anxious student may overlook maps and signs or misinterpret directions (Keefer, 1993), refrain from asking for help (Kuhlthau, 1991) or give up their search relatively quickly (Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, & Lichtenstein, in press). In Mellon's (1986) landmark two-year qualitative study, which involved 6,000 students, she found that 75% to 85% of undergraduate students described their initial library research experiences in terms of anxiety. Indeed, this anxiety either kept them from beginning their search or reduced their motivation to stay in the library long enough to

become competent in the search process. Furthermore, many students felt that their own library skills were inadequate relative to others, and were a source of embarrassment which should be kept hidden (Mellon, 1988). Apparently, these students feared that their ineptness would be revealed by asking questions of other students or of their teachers.

Based on Mellons' theory, Bostick (1992) has identified five general antecedents of library anxiety, namely, "barriers with staff," "affective barriers," "comfort with the library," "knowledge of the library," and "mechanical barriers." *Barriers with staff* refers to the perception of students that librarians and other library staff are intimidating and unapproachable. In addition, the librarian is perceived as being too busy to provide assistance in using the library. Students with this perception tend to report high levels of library anxiety (Mellon, 1986). *Affective barriers* stem from students' feelings of inadequacy about using the library. These feelings of ineptness are heightened by the assumption that they alone possess incompetent library skills (Mellon, 1986). *Comfort with the library* deals with how safe, welcoming, and non-threatening students perceive the library to be. Students who are not comfortable in the library tend to have higher levels of library anxiety (Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, & Lichtenstein, in press). *Knowledge of the library* refers to how familiar with the library students feel they are. A lack of familiarity leads to frustration and anxiety, and subsequently, further avoidance

behaviors (Mellon, 1988). Finally, *mechanical barriers* refer to feelings which emerge as a result of students' reliance on mechanical library equipment, including computer printers, copy machines, and change machines. Students who have difficulty operating one or more pieces of the library equipment tend to experience high anxiety levels.

Although there appears to be widespread agreement that library anxiety is a prevalent phenomenon and that additional research is needed to document and to expand the dimensions of library anxiety (Egan, 1992, Mech & Brooks, 1995), there is a paucity of empirical research in this area. Since anxiety appears to affect the frequency with which students utilize the library (Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, & Lichtenstein, in press), it is important to be able to identify the characteristics of students for whom one or more of these antecedents play a role in increasing their overall level of library anxiety. By being aware of these characteristics, librarians can begin to explore instructional strategies that reduce these anxieties and enable students to exploit fully the resources available to them (Jacobson, 1991). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate factors which are related to these five antecedents of library anxiety.

Methods

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study: the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) and the Demographic Information Form (DIF). The LAS,

developed by Bostick (1992), is a 43-item, 5-point Likert-format instrument which assesses levels of library anxiety. The instrument has five subscales, namely, barriers with staff, affective barriers, comfort with the library, knowledge of the library, and mechanical barriers. For the present study, the reliability of the subscales, as measured by coefficient alpha, ranged from .60 ("mechanical barriers") to .90 ("barriers with staff").

The Demographic Information Form (DIF), which was developed specifically for this study, recorded relevant demographic information, including gender, age, native language, year of study, academic achievement, semester course load, number of course credit hours, number of library instruction courses undertaken, computer usage experience, study habits, employment status, distance between home and the nearest academic library, frequency of library visits, and reasons for visiting the library.

Subjects and Procedure

Five hundred twenty two students from a mid-southern (61.7%) and a northeastern (38.3%) university were administered the LAS and the DIF. The participants were students of the researchers. Since no difference in mean library anxiety level was found between students from the two universities (t = 1.50, p > .05), responses were combined. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 60 years (mean = 22.5, SD = 6.9). Slightly less than two-thirds of the sample (62.9%) were female, while 75.5% spoke English as their

native language. The number of library instructional courses taken by the participants ranged from 0 to 9 (mean = 0.6, *SD* = 0.8). Subjects visited the library at a mean rate of 2.6 times per week (*SD* = 2.2).

Results

A series of setwise multiple regression analyses was performed in order to determine the relationship between the five antecedents of library anxiety and the selected variables.

Barriers with Staff

The multiple regression model selected (F [9, 512] = 7.78, $p < .0001$; R^2 = 21.5%) suggested that students whose perception of librarians heightened their level of anxiety tended to be males, who did not speak English as their native language, who had a relatively heavy course load, and who were engaged in full-time employment. In addition, these students tended to visit the library infrequently, and when they did, utilized the library either to read current newspapers or to search and obtain information for a thesis. Finally, this group of students did not use regularly computerized indexes and online facilities, nor did they use the library in order to study.

Affective Barriers

The model selected as providing the best explanation (F [8, 513] = 5.35, $p < .0001$; R^2 = 14.9%) of the variation in this antecedent suggested that students for whom affective barriers increased library anxiety levels tended not to speak English as

their native language, to have undertaken little or no library instruction courses, and to be engaged in full-time employment. In addition, these students tended to visit the library infrequently, typically to return books. They did not use regularly computerized indexes and online facilities, nor did they use the library in order to study.

Comfort with the Library

The multiple regression model selected (F [8, 513] = 6.52, $p < .0001$; $R^2 = 16.9\%$) suggested that, in general, students who did not perceive the library as providing a safe, welcoming, and non-threatening environment tended to be male, young, have high grade point averages, and to have undertaken little or no library instruction courses. In addition, these students tended to visit the library infrequently and, when they did, utilized the library either to read a book on reserve or to search and obtain information for a thesis. These students did not use regularly computerized indexes and online facilities.

Knowledge of the Library

The selected model (F [7, 514] = 6.96, $p < .0001$; $R^2 = 15.9\%$) indicated that students for whom a lack of knowledge of the library increased anxiety levels tended to be males who had undertaken little or no library instruction courses, and who lived furthest from an academic library. Furthermore, these students tended to visit the library infrequently and, when they did, utilized the library either to use computerized indexes and online facilities or

in order to study.

Mechanical Barriers

The multiple regression model (F [9, 512] = 4.45, $p < .0001$; R^2 = 13.6%) revealed that students for whom mechanical library equipment increased anxiety levels tended to be male and young, not to speak English as their native language, to have high grade point averages, to have more credit hours, and to live furthest from an academic library. Also, these students tended to visit the library in order to use computerized indexes and online facilities or to read books on reserve.

Finally, a series of trend analyses of variance (ANOVA) revealed that anxiety levels induced by the following components tended to decline linearly as a function of year of study: barriers with staff (F [1, 517] = 11.22, $p < .001$); affective barriers (F [1, 517] = 11.56, $p < .001$); comfort with the library (F [1, 517] = 4.81, $p < .05$); and knowledge of the library antecedent (F [1, 517] = 5.13, $p < .05$). For the mechanical barriers subscale, although no linear trend was found (F [1, 517] = 0.01, $p > .05$), a quadratic trend emerged (F [1, 517] = 20.74, $p < .0001$), with scores on the mechanical barriers subscale peaking for sophomores and seniors.

Discussion

It has been documented that library anxiety debilitates information-seeking behavior (Mellon, 1986, 1988). Indeed, according to Keefer (1993, p. 334), library anxiety "not only interferes with the mental and creative processes required, but

supposedly simple physical locating operations are easily degraded by the stress and anxiety of learning the ropes of a new and unfamiliar system." Thus, it is important that steps be taken to reduce that anxiety at the outset (Zahner, 1993). Unfortunately, little is known about the antecedents of library anxiety. This study appears to be the first which uses a quantitative paradigm in order to investigate factors associated with these antecedents.

Based on these findings, recommendations specific to each antecedent are made. The present research and subsequent suggestions serve as a guideline to making use of a college library a more positive experience for students. It is now up to college educators and administrators to develop a greater sensitivity to and heightened awareness of students' needs when using the library, as well as to the potentially debilitating role of library anxiety.

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